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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL KPAQ KMDR ZI

SUBJECT: BIOTECH STILL UNDER FIRE IN ZIMBABWE

¶1. Under headline "Distinguishing drought from famine" an op-ed by Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem carried in the August 27 edition of the independent daily "The Daily News," accuses the United States of "cynically exploiting the plight of the starving to create an artificial market for its genetically modified foods." Excerpts:

¶2. "There is famine in a number of southern African countries with Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia and Angola more affected than the rest. Whatever the reasons for the famine, people are suffering and they need help. But should this be help at all cost and by whatever means? I do not think so. The U.S. Government has been quick to offer help in the form of genetically modified (GM) maize. Zimbabwe rejected it initially and Angola expressed its concern and only last week Zambia also rejected it. On the surface it looks like these governments are behaving as though beggars can choose. With Zimbabwe the demonization of President Mugabe internationally made him 'the usual suspect,' but I do not think that everything the government of Zimbabwe or Mugabe does is bad. There are legitimate issues about GM foods which millions of people in the USA and Europe are unwilling to eat. Why should Africa be the dumping ground or the experimental laboratory?

"Humanitarian agencies are claiming that GM foods should be accepted because it is better than nothing and because people are starving. A very persuasive argument at the emotional level, but it does not address the scientific health concerns about GM foods. Also let us change the context of the appeal. Imagine a predominantly Muslim country is suffering drought, could the people be persuaded to eat pork on the grounds of this is what is available? Or could Hindus be white-mailed into eating beef even if it is the only food available? GM foods are not the only available food surplus in the world and even in Africa itself. The USA is cynically exploiting the plight of the starving to create an artificial market for its GM foods and promote the corporate sharks pushing this food of dubious nutritional and health value."

¶3. Comment: Mr. Abdul-Raheem usually writes more reasonable, better-informed opinion pieces. PAO has responded to the fallacies in this piece and has invited Mr. Abdul-Raheem to discuss biotech and food security issues in greater depth. We will also invite him to attend the August 30 television interactive program with U/S Larson. End comment.

SULLIVAN